











## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

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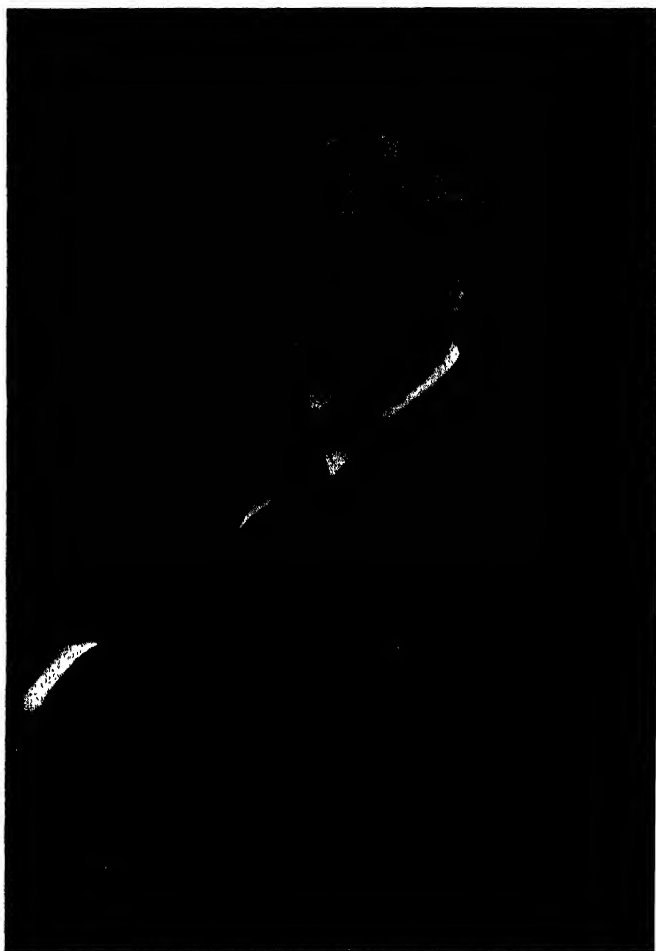
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WILLIAM WATSON

# THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

A PLAY IN EIGHT SCENES

BY

WILLIAM WATSON

LONDON

JOHN LANE, THE BODLEY HEAD

MCMXII

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*TO MY WIFE,  
but for whom it would not have been written,  
I dedicate this play.*

*W. W.*

*New York*

*Feb. 10, 1912*



## DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

### MEN

CLOTAIRE	King of Ideonia
PRINCE HESPERUS	The King's Son
POLITIAN	} Ministers of State
PARMENIO	
ERMINIUS	
VOLMAR	Commander of the Army
HILDERIC	One of Volmar's Captains
PETRUS	A Judge
BRASIDAS	A Leader of the People
ABBO OF THE WOODS	A Hunter and Trapper
GARLIC	
PUNCHEON	

### WOMEN

QUEEN ADALIND

VENORA

ZORAYA

Guards, soldiers, attendants, ushers, and others.

SCENE:—AT FIRST THE BORDERS OF IDEONIA;  
AFTERWARDS, PHANTASMOPOL, THE CAPITOL.

TIME:—THE MORROW OF ANTIQUITY.



• THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN



# THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

A PLAY- IN EIGHT SCENES

## SCENE I

*Volmar's camp among the woods on the borders of Ideonia.*

*Night-time. Beside a stream, Volmar's tent.*

VOLMAR. HILDERIC. *A sentinel. Further off, soldiers sleeping on the ground.*

VOLMAR

To-day six months ago, good Hilderic,  
We camped at this same place on the outward  
march,  
And had our first brush with the enemy.  
It seemed as if each tuft of waving grass,  
And every bramble and whin-bush, hid a foe.  
Where are they now?

HILDERIC

We left them to the kite  
And warhawk, and the grey wolf of the wood.

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

VOLMAR

This stream, that looks so humble a rillet, marks  
The boundary 'twixt their country and our own.  
Here is our native soil, our fatherland, —  
There, Hilderic, the Kingdom we have conquered.

HILDERIC

This brook ran red that night thou speakest of. '

VOLMAR

Ay, it did so! But Nature soon enough  
Washes her hands of us and all we do.  
To-night the stream runs clear as hermit's spring,  
And when I drank of it this afternoon  
It had no taste of slaughter. — Thou hast now  
Three hours for sleep, and then at dawn we march.

HILDERIC

For home!

VOLMAR

For home! Goodnight.

HILDERIC

Goodnight, my lord.

(Exit HILDERIC. VOLMAR goes into his tent, lies down and falls asleep. Enter, stealthily, from a thicket on the further side of the stream, ABBO of the Woods. The sentinel leans against a ledge of rock, nods and dozes.)

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

A B B O

So this is how their lordly one is guarded —  
The sentry drowsed and nodding at his post!  
I've slipped past all the others, and unseen  
Have threaded these dark woodlands, where I know  
Each tree and stone, and every cleft and cave.  
Now in his tent the general is asleep.  
I do not doubt but that he sleeps as well  
As if he had not on his soul one sin:  
The wicked sleep as soundly as the good.  
Yea, it is not the Wronger, but the Wronged,  
That lies awake with raging thoughts, as I  
So oft have done. If I can reach him now —  
One stroke — and I shall be avenged upon him,  
And the next moment, in another world,  
He's cringing for God's mercy. Then — what then?  
If I should fall alive into their hands?  
They'll cut and carve me out of human shape,  
And laugh as they look on. I'll hazard it.

(ABBO moves forward to cross the stream. A loose stone slips from under his foot with a loud noise. The sentinel looks up. Other soldiers start from their sleep on the ground. VOLMAR raises his head and listens. ABBO, unperceived, draws back into the thicket.)

## SCENE II

*A street. On the left, the King's palace, approached by a flight of steps. On the right, at a little distance, a fortress-prison. BRASIDAS. PUNCHEON. GARLIC. Numerous citizens of various grade. A cripple. A beggar.*

### BRASIDAS

This will I say: the war, that now hath clanged  
And thundered to its end, I loved not greatly;  
But its rich fruits, whether indeed they do us  
Much honour in the harvesting or no,  
Will fill the royal treasury to o'erflowing,  
And leave small pretext for those cruel exactions  
Whereby your substance is so taxed away.

### FIRST CITIZEN

They tax our corn, oil, timber, metals, wool —  
They tax our wine —

### PUNCHEON

Ay, there's a grievous impost —  
A duty on good-fellowship, wit, and joy.

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

**FIRST CITIZEN**

How if the soldiers bring more glory home  
Than booty?

**BRASIDAS**

There'll be waggon-loads of both,  
In endless train choking the frantic streets,  
Hour by mad hour.

## SECOND CITIZEN

May all be well! Yet somehow  
There's nothing prancing in men's hearts.

## CRIPPLE

Last night

A star fell like a torch through the lit sky.

THIRD CITIZEN

They say that from his bedchamber the King  
Saw it, and fearing much what it might bode  
Could sleep no more.

## BRASIDAS

Uneasy consciences  
Take fright at lesser things than falling stars.

FOURTH CITIZEN

**Bold words, in such a place! If *we* had said them,  
Yon bastille were our lodging.**

# THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

## BRASIDAS

Well, God knows,  
Its black and hungry mouth may soon enough  
Gape for me too.

## SECOND CITIZEN

Nay, Brasidas in prison  
Would as a martyr be more formidable  
Than Brasidas free, and therein lies thy safety.

## FIRST ARTISAN

Make way there for the lord Parmenio.

*(Enter PARMENIO, going towards the palace steps.)*

## FIRST ARTISAN

My lord, what of the bread-tax?

## SECOND ARTISAN

And the salt-tax?

## THIRD ARTISAN

Ay, and the poll-tax?

## FOURTH ARTISAN

And the hearth-tax?

# THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

## FIRST ARTISAN

•

Are

These to be done away with? or the burden  
A little better suited to the back?

## PUNCHEON

What of those crushing wine-duties, my lord?

•

## BEGGAR

We've heard that doles and bounties are to be  
Given to the poor.

## GARLIC

And the deserving idle.

## FIRST ARTISAN

Silence, thou simpleton.

## SECOND ARTISAN

Is it true our debts

Are to be blotted out?

## BEGGAR

Are prisoned folk

To have their liberty?

## GARLIC

And old offenders

To be rewarded?

# THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

## THIRD ARTISAN

Fool, tie up thy tongue.

## FOURTH ARTISAN

Shall we have cheaper food?

## FIRST ARTISAN

And cheaper justice?

(*PARMENIO, having ascended the palace steps, pauses at the threshold and faces his interrogators.*)

## PARMENIO

Good people, is it seemly, at the King's  
Own door, to pelt me with your questions thus?  
I go to him even now, that I may learn  
From his own mouth his full and fixed intent  
Touching the things you speak of, and to-morrow  
Yourselves shall learn it too.

## FIRST CITIZEN

Give us to-day  
At least an inkling of it. We all know  
That you live close to the King's mind.

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

P A R M E N I O

A King's

Mind is so sentinelled and guarded, one  
May live hard by it and ne'er have seen within.  
Yet, as I would not you should go away  
Famished for news, such knowledge as is mine  
I will impart. 'T is known to you already  
That any day, and almost any hour,  
May witness the return of glorious Volmar,  
Our greatest soldier, and perfect flower of war,  
From conquest of the hereditary foe,  
Bringing his captives with him, and his spoil,  
Trophies, and treasure. Now the King intends  
That this same treasure, which is rumoured vast,  
Shall be applied to the easing of that burden,  
That hard load of taxation, borne by you  
Not without murmur, and upon you laid  
With most reluctant hand. And furthermore,  
From the proud hour of Volmar's homecoming,  
The King ordains a seven days' festival  
For all his people, his own revenue  
To bear the cost. Lastly, so royal are  
The scope and range of his benevolence,  
He will decree the pardon and release  
Of all such men in prison —

*(hesitating)*

# THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

POLITIAN

*(coming from within the palace and standing beside* PARMENIO)

As may be freed  
With safety to the state.

PARMENIO

Ev'n so, my lord  
Politian. Now, good people, you have heard  
The King's benign intentions. Go you therefore  
To your own homes, with loyal and pious hearts,  
Thanking yon Heaven that hath so blessed our  
arms.

*(Exit* POLITIAN)

FIRST CITIZEN

Long live the King.

SECOND CITIZEN

Long live the Count Parmenio.

FIRST ARTISAN

Taxation abolished!

THIRD CITIZEN

Nay, nay, not so fast.

# THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

G A R L I C

A seven weeks' feast!

S E C O N D   A R T I S A N

Seven days, old maunderer.

T H I R D   A R T I S A N

Come, let us spread the news.

P U N C H E O N

If they 'll repeal  
Those taxes on conviviality —

S E C O N D   A R T I S A N

Yes, let us spread the news. 'T is a great day.

G A R L I C

There has not been its like since the millennium.  
(*Exeunt GARLIC and PUNCHEON. Others, on the  
point of going, remain when BRASIDAS speaks.*)

B R A S I D A S

Honoured Parmenio, you are known to all  
As one not hard to approach, when men crave light  
On things that touch their bosoms. Will you  
tell us

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

What order of offenders these may be,  
For whom their prison doors are to fly open?  
The common felon? the prowling man of prey?  
The cutpurse and the cut-throat? Is it to these  
You'll grant a new lease of the sun and sky?

### P A R M E N I O

Brasidas, they whose judgment guides this realm  
Allow you a large liberty of speech:  
Allow to them some liberty of silence.  
In statecraft there are things that cannot be  
As public as a peepshow at a fair.  
The council chamber of a King is secret,  
Even as the heart and inwards of thy body  
Are secret. To uncover their hid workings  
Were to destroy thee, body and heart and all.

### B R A S I D A S

Oh, there's a world of secret things, my lord,  
You've touched not on; and since you will not  
tell me  
What men are to be freed, who then are they  
You mean to keep in bonds? Are they the  
wretches  
Denounced, in secret, for what cause we know not,  
And after secret trial hurried down

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

Where secret night hugs them with iron arms?  
'T is a plain question, worth a plain reply.

### P A R M E N I O

You call your words a question: they are rather  
An accusation and a wild indictment  
Hurled against law and justice.

### B R A S I D A S

• Law and justice!  
When was I not the fieriest of their lovers?  
Those I indict are they that make the law  
A byword and a hissing. Turn not thou  
Away, but hear me. In yon prison-house  
My father suffers for a deed he did not,  
And there is he in fetters, where this light  
We call impartial sends him scarce a beam.  
Oh, justice is a word that you keep near you,  
But she, Justice herself, hath long been banished,  
And somewhere far from all the abodes of Law  
Her place of exile is.

### P A R M E N I O

Your private griefs  
Are known, and in some measure may be held  
To excuse the violence of your tongue. But try not

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

The patience of Authority too far.  
Insulted Power can any time out short  
The freedom you misuse.

### BRASIDAS

I do defy it  
To lay a hand upon me. With a signal  
I could call forth a host as from the ground,  
Who, if you dared to cast me in yon prison,  
Would batter down its walls founded in blood,  
Its doors dabbled with blood, its towers that rise  
Out of a fen and rank morass of blood,  
Unpacified blood, not to be quieted,  
Not to be put to sleep in the earth at all.

*(Exit)*

### PARMENIO

A man so covered with a foam of words  
Proclaims himself bankrupt of argument.

*(Exit into palace)*

### FIRST ARTISAN

Well, that is as it may be.

### SECOND ARTISAN

For my part,  
I think our Brasidas had the best of it.

# THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

## THIRD ARTISAN

We could see plainly which one feared the other.

## A CITIZEN

You all must own, Parmenio bears no blemish  
As husband, father, or friend.

## THIRD ARTISAN

Why, there's an adage,  
'The greatest villains never break a law,'—  
Not that I hint at villainy in his lordship.

## FOURTH ARTISAN

Come, let's remember in what place we stand.  
They say the gallows hath put some to silence  
Because they thought too loudly.

*(Re-enter PUNCHEON)*

## FIFTH ARTISAN

As for me,  
I've a great mind to go about my business;  
For I begin to think that politics are  
A study should be left to learned men,  
Such as astronomers, and the best-born clergy.

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

### PUNCHEON

There be few thirstier studies. ' It begets  
A marvellous great drouth in a man's throat.

### FIFTH ARTISAN

My study is mending shoes.

### GARLIC

Mend thou thy manners,  
And stand not gabbling 'neath the very nose  
Of greatness. Seest thou not yon lords?

*(Enter from the palace POLITIAN and PARMENIO,  
who stand in the doorway.)*

### THIRD ARTISAN

They look  
Severely on us.

### FOURTH ARTISAN

Our free speech has been  
O'erheard.

### FIRST CITIZEN

I am called hence on urgent business.

# THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

## SECOND CITIZEN

Mine own affairs press furiously.

## THIRD CITIZEN

Mine, too,  
Call loudly for me.

## FOURTH CITIZEN

Come, let us begone.  
(*Exeunt all persons in the street. POLITIAN and  
PARMENIO descend the steps.*)

## POLITIAN

Mind you, I do not say that the belief  
In signs and omens and the like is nought  
But vulgar superstition; for indeed  
I never did deny that these things are.  
But why should *we* befog our intellects  
With such dark matters? Life is not too clear  
At broadest noonday, and these messages  
Dropt from the void are written in a cypher  
Of which we lack the key.

## PARMENIO

True, true enough;  
But meet you not a strange mood in the land?

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

No gaiety gambols by — and here and there  
Men congregate like birds that have forewarning  
Of dread events in Nature.

P O L I T I A N

We'll divert

Their minds with shows and pageantry. Such toys  
Put that great babe, the People, in good humour.

*(Enter ZORAYA)*

But who is this? Old as the cliffs she seems,\*  
Yet as unbowed as they are. What would'st  
thou with us?

Z O R A Y A

My errand is to speak unto the King.

P O L I T I A N

Impossible. He is sick, and hath much need  
Of slumber.

Z O R A Y A

They that sent me do not sleep.

P O L I T I A N

And who are they, good dame?

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

Z O R A Y A

They are the Powers  
That spin the secret threads of life and death.

P A R M E N I O

Thou art she the people call the prophetess?

Z O R A Y A

Too great a title. I receive, at most,  
Blurred intimations of what is to be.  
I am tantalised with Heaven's half-confidences.  
I am hurt with flying splinters of the truth.

P A R M E N I O

Speak what thou knowest. If evil be at hand,  
Whom does it menace?

Z O R A Y A

I can only tell thee  
That doom hangs o'er this day, and *here* will fall.  
Nought more do I know.

(*Exit*)

P A R M E N I O

She gives to it no form  
Our senses can lay hold on.

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

POLITIAN

For my palate,  
This diet is a thought too translunary.  
I have lived my life with things that can be  
touched,  
Tested, and weighed.

PARMENIO

Yet there are other things.

POLITIAN

Oh, there are things which better brains than  
mine  
Ere now have dashed themselves to pieces on;  
But if I break my pate, 't is little solace  
To have broken it sublimely, against the stars.  
Here our ways part —

PARMENIO

Until we meet again  
An hour past noon.

POLITIAN

That time when day, like me,  
Grows middle-aged and unromantical.

*(Exit)*

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

### P A R M E N I O

How covetable that strictly bounded mind,  
No shreds of twilight hanging loose upon it!  
Mine own leans out into the Dark, and so  
Hazards its very balance, in hope to catch  
The footfall of events ere they arrive,  
And from the Dark wins nothing. 'Tis to no  
purpose

One plays the eavesdropper about Fate's door.  
The servants there are incorruptible,  
And will not sell one secret to the world.

*(Exit)*

### SCENE III

*A room in the palace opening widely on a garden, which lies in brilliant sunshine. PARMENIO alone. To him enter POLITIAN. In the garden an aged gardener at work.*

P O L I T I A N

Where is the Prince?

P A R M E N I O

Here I await him now,  
But he forgets.

P O L I T I A N

His studies more and more  
Engross him. History, polity, jurisprudence —  
He takes them all as steps by which to mount  
Toward the crowning art of ruling men.

P A R M E N I O

He does not seem disdainful of the art  
Of wooing women.

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

POLITIAN

• There I think he trusts  
Rather to Nature. Hark, I hear his foot.

*(Enter PRINCE HESPERUS)*

PARMENIO

Highness, what news of Volmar?

HESPERUS

He hath crossed  
The mountain ridge already. His messengers,  
Sent spurring on before him at the dawn,  
Have just arrived. Hither he marches slowly,  
Much cumbered with the greatness of his spoil,  
But ere the daylight droops it is believed  
He will be here. There is a grassy knoll  
From whose smooth shoulder he will first look  
down  
Upon the city. Then will his trumpeters  
Sound out their taratantara on the air,  
Blowing a silver salutation to us.  
All hath gone well — save only that I fear  
This sickness of the King will somewhat tarnish  
Our pomps, and give a greyness and a pallor  
To our rejoicings.

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

P A R M E N I O

But he hath great power  
Of rallying! Is he not in the garden?

H E S P E R U S

Ay, there  
My father sits, quite worn out with the chase.

P A R M E N I O

The chase?

H E S P E R U S

Three nights and days he hath hunted sleep,  
And still it flies and flies.

*(Enter VENORA, followed by a waiting maid carrying needlework.)*

V E N O R A

Do I break in  
Upon high matters?

H E S P E R U S

Yes, sweet lady, you  
Break in upon them as the snowdrop breaks  
In upon January.

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

VENORA

I cannot do

A stitch of this embroidery to-day;

(to her maid)

Yet leave it. (*Exit maid*) I have but one thought  
— a hero

Comes homeward, beautiful with victory.

POLITIAN

A great and fair occasion. I remember  
One very different — the return of Rainald  
From miserable defeat.

HESPERUS

Him that was called  
A whirlwind on a warhorse in his day.

VENORA

A weeping welcome would be his, I doubt not.

POLITIAN

A silent one — save for a few that hissed.

VENORA

O shameful! I'd have stripped the summer of all  
Its roses, to make sweet the ways for him.

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

H E S P E R U S

Alas, we oft are prone to do as they did:  
The man whom Fate hath scourged we scourge  
again.  
To-day let us forget these things.

V E N O R A

How darkly  
Yon cedar reaches out its solemn arms!  
I am a little sorry for the flowers  
That have to live so near it. Their gay thoughts  
Seem chidden and put down by its grave bearing,  
And for their sake I think that I could almost  
Wish it away.

H E S P E R U S

Ah, know you not its story?  
Then listen. It was mine ancestor Alexius,  
The founder of our house, who long ago  
Did with his own hand set that tree in earth;  
And 't is affirmed that our own royal fortunes  
Are with its life bound up: if it decay,  
We wither; while it flourishes we flourish;  
But when it dies we fall from sovereignty,  
And wear a crown no more.

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

VENORA

Then will we hope  
The tree keeps young in heart, for I have heard,  
That is the secret of long life in all things.

*(Enter, in the garden, the KING.)*

Look where the King himself walks toward it.

HESPERUS

With what slow, feeble steps!

VENORA

Since I have been  
A guest within these walls, I never saw him  
Leaning upon his staff so wearily.

KING

*(touching the tree caressingly)*

Still sound — still sound and hale. How many  
a time

In troubled dreams have I beheld thee maimed,  
And stricken through with death! But in clear  
daylight

Is not all well with thee? Art thou not full  
Of great desire to live for ages yet,  
And is not great desire strong as resolve?

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

Oh, that I had some sovereign prophylactic,  
Able to drive far from thee all disease,  
And all decay for ever!

H E S P E R U S

Is it meet  
That we should gaze on his distempered mood?

V E N O R A

It is not kind.

H E S P E R U S

Let's forth into the sun.

K I N G

*(to the gardener)*

Fellow, what things in Nature may they be,  
What powers of earth or air, that most do threaten  
The life and welfare of a tree like this?

G A R D E N E R

Why, King, a tree be in many ways mightily  
like a man. Now if a man feed well, and live  
orderly, and keep a still mind, and have no very  
great shocks of trouble, he may come to a wonder-  
ful great age. And so is it with trees. But there

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

is the weevil, now, that eateth through the bark: unto the tree he is like gnawing care, cark and care, and in time he will let in death to the very heartwood. Then there be long droughts, whereby the tree is stinted of its right meat and drink: that is want — woful want — and good trees hath it killed. Then there are fell tempests also; these be great shocks, and they do not come and go without leaving their mark somewhere, though the eye may see it not.

K I N G

How long might this cedar yet live?

G A R D E N E R .

Why, King, that is most hard to tell. But it may live a long while yet, except it die suddenly by the act of God.

K I N G

What meanest thou?

G A R D E N E R

I mean naught else but the lightning, the thunderbolt; for that is the act of God.

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

### KING

Ay, truly. And if the lightning should split this trunk, I fall at one stroke from Kinghood to an estate which a beggar might despise. For then should I and mine in a moment be but as your mock princes, your hide-and-seek pretenders, that go pranked in a sort of out-at-elbow greatness, and posture through life, demanding the reverence no man pays, and for ever sighing over lost occasions; the very phantoms of majesty. To come to that in a twinkling! How terrible a thing may be the act of God!

### GARDENER

Oho, there is rottenness in this branch. This in time would open the door to death. This bough must be lopped straightway.

*(Enter QUEEN in the garden)*

### KING

*(The gardener lops the bough)* — Hold, sirrah!  
Oh, what is this that thou hast done?  
I felt his blade strike through me here.  
*(He staggers, the QUEEN supports him.)* Queen! —  
wife! —

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

What ruthless surgeon have they sent to me,  
That gashes me in the side, and leaves unstaunched  
The wound his bistoury gave?

QUEEN

Nay, King, thou hast  
No hurt at all. But thy long sleepless nights  
Have sorely jarred thy brain. The air to-day  
Is of a fevering heat in this closed garden.  
I know not if 't is good for thee.

KING

My mind  
Fell ghastly sick one moment; but thy voice  
Hath ever unto me a healing sound,  
And I am well again.

QUEEN

Let us go in.

*(They enter the palace. Enter from another side  
POLITIAN, PARMENIO, and ERMINIUS.)*

ERMINIUS

Your Grace, I have discovered and frustrated  
Yet one more foul design — these letters here

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

Attest its deadly nature — to subvert  
Your rule, and overthrow the throne itself.

K I N G

*(glancing at papers)*

The air hums with conspiracies to uproot me.

E R M I N I U S

Sir, during this your ever blessed reign,  
I have unearthed in all ten several plots  
Against your Majesty's most sacred life.

P O L I T I A N

*(aside)*

After inventing at least nine of them.

E R M I N I U S

I wait not the full hatching of these treasons,  
But crush them as it were in the very egg,  
Almost before there is —

P O L I T I A N

*(aside)*

A hen to lay it.

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

ERMINIUS

• (to POLITIAN)

My lord, I wish you nobler occupation  
Than piecing out another's sentences.

POLITIAN

Forgive me; it was a crude attempt to show  
How I esteem the diligence and despatch  
That under your direction have so marked  
Our<sup>•</sup> judicature.

ERMINIUS

If this be irony,  
I understand it not; for none denies  
That in our courts Conviction with all promptness  
Follows upon<sup>•</sup> the heels of Accusation,  
While Execution lags not far behind.

KING

The authors of this plot —

ERMINIUS

Are all in irons.

KING

Why is yon fellow Brasidas still at large?  
He brawls under my windows like a fishwife,

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

Hawking sedition of so rank an odour,  
Stale fish were lavender to it.

ERMINIUS

Majesty,  
We do not think him dangerous. He has  
Indeed no following save a sort of men  
Whose thought will never ripen into action.

KING

Thought has been tolerated much too long.

ERMINIUS

It is indeed most troublous.

KING

Look you to it  
That from to-morrow he be in safe keeping.  
We'll see whether the chastening prison diet  
Give any touch of fine austerity  
To an eloquence a little overblown.

ERMINIUS

Consider, sir, — at such a time, — the man  
Being so popular —

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

POLITIAN

And to do him justice  
He is rather a good quality of windbag.

PARMENIO

I have no cause to love him. But oft such  
men  
Are to the State as boiling springs to the  
earth,  
That vent her plethora and so cool her fever.

KING

Enough — enough — I see you are all in league  
With them that plot against me. It is to you  
I owe it that I cannot sleep i' the night  
For menacing voices, yea, and furtive hands,  
That draw aside the curtains of my bed,  
And only fail of their intent by some  
Mighty interposition. Get you gone  
Out of my house. What are you — counsellors?  
Counterfeits rather — mimes — semblances —  
spectres.  
Out of my house: is it not haunted enough  
Already? Go.  
(*Exeunt* POLITIAN, PARMENIO, and ERMINIUS.)

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

Q U E E N

Dear lord, these altercations'  
Do only leave thee shattered. Put all discord  
Far from thy mind, and let us walk again  
Among the agreeing flowers.

K I N G

Presently  
I'll to the garden with thee; and in truth  
My life is well-nigh bounded by its walls.

*(Paces the room, then pauses.)*

The air is very heavy and still. Almost  
Would night seem to have trespassed upon day,  
So dark it grows.

*(Enter HESPERUS and VENORA from the garden.)*

H E S P E R U S

Dark? Doth he jest? If not,  
Then, in the name of sunlight and all splendour,  
What fantasy is this? Father, I think  
A brighter day never lit up the world.

K I N G

Have I no eyes? For all permitted uses  
I have a pair as serviceable as thine. —  
No palsy in them.

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

PRINCE

• But the spirit's fatigue  
May for a time oppress the lucid vision.

KING

I tell thee I can see as well as thou;  
And were there any falseness in a man,  
Though he were mine own child, I should espy  
it.

I'll put my sight to the test before you all.  
Lady, thy finest, thy most tenuous needle!  
And now a thread, the slenderest filament  
Thou hast. If quickly through this needle's  
eye

My hand persuade the silken thread to travel,  
Wilt thou still hold me purblind?

*(He attempts to thread the needle.)*

• Nay, I cannot!

It is this wan, blear, and untimely darkness  
Baffles mine eyes.

PRINCE

Strange, he should talk of darkness,  
When all above us is perfect blue and gold,  
And there is not a speck upon the day.

# THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

K I N G

*(looking out upon the garden)*

Still darker. It is that great silent moment  
When stands the packed and loaded storm, in  
doubt

Whether to hurl the thunderstone or no.  
The massy blackness builds itself as a wall,  
With towers that topple upon us; and there are  
faces,

Puckering enormous brows. Cannot a man  
Cherish a cedar and watch over it,  
And ravel up his heartstrings with its fibres,  
But soon the very heavens must seek it out  
With an especial malice, to work its ruin?  
Stay, thunder, in thy caverns! Or burst forth,  
And mow down all the forests of the world  
With thy hot scythe, so thou but spare these  
boughs,

Whereon the fate of Kings yet unconceived  
Trembles. Ah, now the storm breaks from its  
moorings,

And the forked fury with its jagged leap  
Already is on us. It strikes the tree: the cedar  
Is riven to its anguished roots — it falls asunder,  
Crashing unto the earth, and bears us with it,  
Pulled from our height of place and royal station

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

For ever. Now am I a King no more,  
And thou indeed art a King's son no more,  
And thou — thou art queenly still, but Queen no  
more.

Thy hand, — here will I rest a little.

*(He totters into a chair.)*

Tear off

This purple lie: we are nothing now — or only  
A proverb of the unstableness of the earth  
Beneath the feet of princes.

### QUEEN

If he could

But sleep awhile, that were the sovereign balsam,  
And waking he would be himself again.

•

*(A sound of distant trumpets. The KING lifts his  
head and listens.)*

### VENORA

Hark!

### HESPERUS

It is Volmar greeting us from the hill.

*(The KING sinks into sleep.)*

## SCENE IV

*The same.* HESPERUS, booted and spurred.  
VENORA.

HESPERUS

The hours go nimbly, — it is almost time  
That I were riding forth to meet the hero.

*(Enter QUEEN)*

How is my father?

QUEEN

He is in deep sleep.

HESPERUS

His chiefest need!

QUEEN

I think that when he wakens,  
The thick cloud will have lifted from his brain.

HESPERUS

And he will be again the King we knew.

*(Enter an usher)*

# THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

U S H E R

An officer of General Count Volmar's,  
Sent in advance of the returning forces,  
Craves access to this presence.

H E S P E R U S

Let him in.

(*Enter HILDERIC*)

Is it not Hilderich?

H I L D E R I C

It is, my lord.

H E S P E R U S

A brave and skilful soldier. Thou art welcome.

H I L D E R I C

The General, who will soon be at the gates,  
Hath sent me on as bearer of this gift  
Of jewels, if her grace will not disdain it.

(*Servants bring in a treasure-chest.*)

(*To QUEEN*) Lord Volmar bade me say, that he  
himself

Hath little learning in their qualities,  
And should there be among them things of nought,  
He begs you'll pardon both the gift and giver.

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

QUEEN

Why, here are sapphires, rubies, emeralds —

VENORA

Calcedony, and sardonyx, and jacinth —

QUEEN

And every coveted gem the earth conceives.  
A lordly gift indeed!

HESPERUS

Thou bringest jewels,  
But it is news we are most greedy of.  
Draw me a picture of the war, as thou  
Didst see it.

HILDERIC

Well, sir, it hath been a fierce  
And bitter strife. For at the outset, mark you,  
The enemy did so stubbornly resist,  
Even to the point of wild foolhardihood,  
That nought was left us but to throw away  
All mercy, and strike terror deep and wide.  
Therefore did we let loose those trusty hounds,  
Rapine and Fire; and ever as we marched,  
We lit our way with blazing farms and hamlets.  
But when we had put whole cities to the sword,

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

And plentifully had sown the seed of famine  
By wasting all their fruitfulest land, the rest  
Was easy; for the people's spirit then  
Being broken, they looked on with listless gaze  
At their own ruin, and we now bring home  
The spoil of temples and of palaces,  
The choicest treasures of a once rich Kingdom,  
Leaving behind us peace, and a great stillness.

•

VENORA

On what a deep, wide base of other's sorrow  
Is built to-day our joy!

HILDERIC

Ay, madam, that  
Is true enough; but 't is the sort of truth  
To which we soldiers have to give the go-by.

VENORA

Yet surely there's a place in heroes' hearts,  
Where pity for the fall'n hath lodging?

HILDERIC

Madam,  
I have a little son, some five years old,  
As pretty a rogue as you should wish to see,  
Who has an army all of painted tin —

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

A standing army — till he knocks it down —  
And then, what pity has he for the fallen?

H E S P E R U S

Not much, I'll swear.

H I L D E R I C

Well, as he plays *his* game,  
So play we ours — upon a larger table.  
But play it on a kingdom or a carpet,  
'T is still a game. 'T is the great Game of War.

H E S P E R U S

Which men play basely or nobly, as themselves  
Are base or noble. But take it as we will,  
Destruction is a destroying, slaughter a slaying.  
We cannot yet make war as we make love,  
Carry a citadel by a serenade,  
And ride into a fortress on a sigh.  
For war is war, its chronicles at their best  
Dreadful, and at their worst an inventory  
Of all that is in Hell.

Q U E E N

Come, let us look  
Once more at these rare treasures. Amulets

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

And signets — cameos and intaglios —  
Here's wealth enough to dower an emperor's  
daughter!

### HESPERUS

Had Volmar flung a province in thy lap,  
'T were scarce a richer offering.

### VENORA

• Do but mark  
The wondrous workmanship! — stone after stone  
Carved into shapes of life, or overwrought  
With fancies, dreams — out of old Grecian story.  
Here Hermes binds Ixion — his wheel;  
Here is the yet unfreed Andromeda;  
Here Theseus slays the Minotaur; and there  
A naked soul quails before Rhadamanthus,  
The cold judge of the dead. On this is figured  
The maiden goddess of the bow and quiver;  
On this, Medea drives her dragon team.  
Lo, Psyche here, at last made one with Eros,  
And all her sorrows over. And on that sard  
You may behold Achilles, not in wrath,  
But with a brow of pity, as when he mourned  
Penthesilea.

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

H E S P E R U S

Carven in green Jasper  
Here stands Actaeon, by his own hounds torn,  
As men are torn by their own fierce desires,  
Who hunt delight too madly.

V E N O R A

And upon  
This amethyst Arachne at her loom,  
Daring to match the perfect woof of Pallas,  
Weaves her own perfect woe.

Q U E E N

Hardly a gem  
But tells some ancient tale — alas, how oft  
A mournful one!

V E N O R A

Here is a priceless stone  
So rudely wrought it must be wondrous old.

H E S P E R U S

Rather I think it but of our own day.  
For Art, being in its childhood barbarous ever,  
In feeble age grows barbarous again,  
Its second childhood reached. Yet here is not

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

A jewel but might fittingly adorn,  
At to-night's feast, the lovliest brow or bosom.  
To-night, good Hilderic, thy great commander,  
And thou and all his captains, sup with us;  
And if the fare be worthy of the guests,  
This house will not have seen a goodlier banquet.

### H I L D E R I C

We'll bring brave appetites, I'll take my oath on 't,  
And some of us a valiant thirst to boot.

### H E S P E R U S

The jocund lamplight hath a happier secret  
In drawing heart to heart than the staid day,  
And under it we'll all meet joyously.

## SCENE V

*The street in front of the palace, crowded with all sorts of persons in gay attire, amongst them ABBO of the Woods, conspicuous in sombre rustic garb. In the doorway of the palace, the QUEEN, HESPERUS, VENORA, POLITIAN, PARMENIO, and other courtiers and ladies.*

ABBO

Nay, friend, grudge me not a little standing-room.

FIRST CITIZEN

But thou requirest so much of it. Thou art made on such a large pattern.

ABBO

Well, well, we are none of us built after our own planning — else thy nose would have been shorter.

CHORUS OF VOICES

Ha, ha, ha!

# THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

## SECOND CITIZEN

Who planned that coat of thine?

## FIRST CITIZEN

In what King's reign flourished thy tailor?

## THIRD CITIZEN

Did thy clothes come out of Noah's Ark?

## ABBO

Now ye should all be grateful to me, seeing that my old homespun doth the better set off your finery.

## FIRST CITIZEN

Ay, to be sure it doth. And no doubt thy garments were fashionable enough in Methuselah's time.

## FOURTH CITIZEN

Come, let the man alone. He hath an honest country face.

## SECOND CITIZEN

Ay, and acres of honest country mud on his boots.

# THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

## FIRST CITIZEN

Hark, they are at hand.

## VOICES IN ANOTHER STREET

Long live Volmar! Hail to the conqueror!  
Long life to Volmar! Hail, Volmar!

*(Enter VOLMAR riding at the head of his army  
accompanied by HESPERUS.)*

## VOICES

Hail, Volmar! Long life to the victor! Glory  
to Volmar and all his host! Hail to thee, Volmar!  
Honour to the conqueror! Hail, hail!

*(VOLMAR dismounts and is met on the palace steps  
by the KING and QUEEN, and others of the royal  
household.)*

## KING

Welcome, most noble Volmar. You went from us  
Under a pelting hail of men's good wishes,  
To come back in the sunshine of their praise.

## VOLMAR

A very thunderous sunshine, Prince, so loud  
The people cheered us.

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

HESPERUS

And what sound on earth  
Matches the crash and peal of a people's joy?

QUEEN

Our welcome of you is in softer key,  
But not less truly 't is the heart that speaks it.

KING

Forgive me that I rode not forth to meet thee,  
Beyond the walls, as I would fain have done;  
For gladly had I seen, from afar off,  
The mingled dust and glitter of thine approach,  
But the infirmities of this vext clay  
Here held me bound and captive. Take thou now  
The thanks that unto valour and lofty service  
Are due, and if I use a poor pale word  
For want of nobler, hear thou in it only  
Its wealthiest meaning. I am forced to drink  
Deep of inglorious rest, a thing I loathe —  
For in my youth they taught me that to rest  
Is to rust also; but to-night we revel,  
We feast together, thou and I and mine;  
And we will talk of all the battles thou  
Hast fought, and the great wars we both have  
known,

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

And the great warriors; and with memories such  
As these we'll fledge the hours.

V O L M A R

Ay, sir, we'll make them  
Flee like your routed foes. And sweet, indeed  
To us that long have fed on soldiers' fare,  
Sweet will it be, to gather at thy table,  
Exchange the rough life of the camp and field  
For princely cheer, princely companionship,  
Forget the reek of carnage in the breath  
Of ladies' lips, and speed the night on wings  
Of wassail, and drink down the morning star  
In cups of triumph!

A B B O

Go drink of Hell's flood tide.  
(*Plucks a dagger from his breast and flings himself  
on VOLMAR.*)

V O L M A R

Off, off, vile peasant!  
(*Is stabbed and falls. Shrieks of women. Wild  
commotion.*)

V O I C E S

He is stabbed to death!  
Volmar is murdered!

# THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

QUEEN

Murdered — at our door?

*(The KING sinks back and is supported by his courtiers.)*

HESPERUS

Seize the assassin.

*(Leaps into the street, followed by PARMENIO and others. ABBO is surrounded and stands warding off attempts to overpower him.)*

FIRST CITIZEN

Seize him.

SECOND CITIZEN

Show him no mercy.

THIRD CITIZEN

Despatch him.

A SOLDIER

Flay him first.

FIRST CITIZEN

Rend him in pieces.

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

H E S P E R U S

Stay! Harm him not!      °

A S O L D I E R

O Prince, this churl has killed  
Thy noblest.

H E S P E R U S

(*bending over VOLMAR's body*)  
Are ye sure the wound is mortal?

P A R M E N I O

Perhaps it is not past the healer's skill.

A N O F F I C E R

Yea, 't is his heartblood overflows these steps.

A S O L D I E R

Dead — dead, my lords.

H E S P E R U S

O miserable end!  
Thou shouldst have fall'n in splendour of battle,  
slain  
By some most glorious sword — and here thou  
liest,  
Thy flame of life put out by yon base hand.  
Who art thou, wretch?

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

ABBO

My name is Abbo. Where  
I dwelt, men call me Abbo of the Woods.

HESPERUS

Have I not somewhere looked upon thy face?

ABBO

I cannot tell.

A SOLDIER

Suffer us now to slay

This man.

HESPERUS

Again I charge you, harm him not!  
Stand off from him. So great a murderer  
Shall fall not thus, beneath your casual steel.  
No single arm shall hew him down haphazard,  
Nor aught less than a realm and people be  
His executioner; for he shall have  
Justice, a thing more terrible to the wicked  
Than random vengeance. Take ye him away,  
And set strict guard on him. Deny him not  
The smallest customary privilege  
The law decrees for men yet uncondemned.  
Omit no form, fulfil each due observance,

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

And let him, at the fitting place and time,  
Be brought to trial and judgment, that hereafter  
None shall have cause to say of us, 'They gave  
The violent up to violence, and delivered  
Unto the lawless them that broke the laws.'  
Take ye him hence and do no wrong to him.

## SCENE VI

*The same. Enter from one side a countryman with his wife and child. From the other side*  
GARLIC.

C O U N T R Y M A N

Good master, is it true that there is to be no shows or plays or feasting?

G A R L I C

Ay, the King hath in his infinite wisdom forbid them by reason of this great man's death.

C O U N T R Y W O M A N

We might as well ha' stayed at home.

G A R L I C

Have ye travelled far?

C O U N T R Y M A N

A matter of twenty mile.

G A R L I C

I had an uncle was a great traveller in his youth, but he made a true repentance and died

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

a right godly man, much honoured as a cheese-monger.

### COUNTRYMAN

Was not this a very great man indeed that was killed hereabouts?

### GARLIC

Ay, he was a very great man. He was, as ye may say, an ensample to us all. Have ye not heard what a world of trouble and mischief he was ever stirring up? That is the sure sign of your truly great man.

### CHILD

Mother, what is a great man like to look at?

### COUNTRYWOMAN

Lord, child, how should I know, that never saw one?

### CHILD

I should fear to meet one on a dark night.

### GARLIC

When I think upon such greatness as was his, I seem in mine own eyes to be scarce more than an ordinary mortal. Were ye never here before?

# THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

COUNTRYWOMAN

Never in all our days.

GARLIC

There is much ye might see with profit. Yonder, now, is our famous jail, and if ye go round by the northeast side ye will espy the gallows. A nobler gallows you could not wish for.

COUNTRYWOMAN

We had a most fair prospect of it as we came by.

GARLIC

Well, I must now bid you good-day. See that ye fall not among evil company. These be graceless times and there is fearful regeneracy around us.

*(Exit)*

COUNTRYMAN AND COUNTRYWOMAN

Good-day, good master.

*(Enter from opposite sides BRASIDAS and a CITIZEN)*

BRASIDAS

All is in readiness. You will not forget the hour?

# THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

CITIZEN

God forbid.

*(Exit)*

BRASIDAS

*(to the countryfolk)*

Have ye any friends in this city that could protect you from harm if need were?

COUNTRYMAN

Nay, sir, we know not a soul.

BRASIDAS

There may be tumults. If you are wise, you will go back to your village. I counsel you for your good.

COUNTRYMAN

Sir, I am sure thou dost. We will go back to-night. I would we were home now on our farmstead.

*(Exeunt countrypeople)*

BRASIDAS

Good simple folk, what mummerly and trumpery they come hither to gaze at! and at home they have the great pageant of the harvest, and all the sweetness of the earth at their doors.

## SCENE VII

*The same. Night-time. Enter BRASIDAS near the prison. He knocks at a barred window.*

BRASIDAS

What tidings?

*(The window is slightly opened and a light flashed on his face.)*

VOICE WITHIN

Is it Brasidas?

BRASIDAS

'T is he.

VOICE

The flax field is in flower.

BRASIDAS

Goodnight.

VOICE

Goodnight.

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

### BRASIDAS

So all is well. He hath the signal-word  
At his tongue's tip. And yet was that the voice  
I thought to hear? Yes, all is well. And soon  
My sworn and faithful will have gathered to me,  
And by connivance of the friend within,  
Long ere the dawn, this fortress of foul night,  
This house of groans, this place of shuddering,  
Will be delivered up into our hands,  
With all its secret archives, that will show  
Tyranny with her gorgeous vesture off,  
Her very self, stripped to her soul. And yet,  
Did not the voice sound unfamiliar?  
No, all is well; misgivings must not now  
Trammel the hot wheels of Resolve, when fate  
Hangs on a filament of gossamer.  
It is the cavernous and deep-mouthed night,  
That gives unto all voices its own accent.

*(Enter ZORAYA, going towards the palace steps.  
BRASIDAS conceals himself in shadow.)*

### ZORAYA

Here was it done, here was he taken and slain.  
They have not even washed the blood away.  
Or is it the red hue of porphyry

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

That under this perverting and sick light  
Can mock mine eyes? Nay, it is blood itself,  
Haunting these steps. But Oh, thou murdered  
man,

It was by far, far redder steps than these  
That thou didst climb to what men take for  
greatness.

Thou wert more cruel than the forest fire,  
Thou wert more callous than the lean-lipped sea.  
And thou didst climb and climb as a sleep-walker  
May climb a mountain knowing not it is Etna  
Till headlong down its sulphurous throat he falls.  
I hear a step. Is 't Brasidas?

BRASIDAS

None other.

ZORAYA

Friend, whatsoever scheme or undertaking  
Thou hast in hand, attempt not on this night  
To shape it to a deed.

BRASIDAS

How hast thou heard?  
To none hath it been breathed, save them that  
were  
To act with me.

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

Z O R A Y A

No matter how I know,  
Or what I know. But if thou should'st proceed  
With what thou did'st intend, expect disaster.

B R A S I D A S

Whence, then, does hidden danger threaten?

Z O R A Y A

Enough  
That something thou would'st war against is strong  
To-night, and watchful. What indeed it is  
I do but dimly see. It rises like  
A crag that hurls back a besieging wave.

B R A S I D A S

I know thee full of truth as of strange foresight,  
And this thy warning chimes with mine own  
doubts,  
That were but now with difficulty stilled.  
If I put off this enterprise, what then?

Z O R A Y A

Have thou a little patience. Let time work.  
Slowly the spirit of the world itself

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

Is bringing to the birth all thou did'st dream,  
And with thee or without thee shall thy cause  
Prevail.

B R A S I D A S

My cause is nothing less than man's.

Z O R A Y A

Then it *must* conquer.

B R A S I D A S

Unless Evil have  
Indeed celestial warrant, and gross wrong  
Be something at which deity itself  
Connives. But *that* I'll ne'er believe. — Zoraya,  
There's not much passes within palace walls  
But thou dost know it — or so runs the rumour:  
What hast thou heard to-night touching the King?

Z O R A Y A

At first, when he looked on at Volmar's death,  
Horror quite smote him down; but shaking off  
His weakness like a mantle, he rose as though  
Calamity had girded up and braced him,  
Such quick rebound of spirit he hath.

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

BRASIDAS

Some say

He carries, in a ring upon his finger,  
Drops of a wondrous potion, a quintessence  
Not to be used save in extremity,  
But able to call back the escaping life  
Even when in act to fly.

ZORAYA

And some declare

It hath quite opposite virtue.

BRASIDAS

Ah! — who knows?

Tell me one other thing. In these last days  
Do any tidings of my father reach thee?

ZORAYA

He is no more in prison. This very morn  
He was set free, by one who soon or late  
Does from these corporal bonds enlarge us all.

BRASIDAS

What, is my father dead? Dead in a dungeon!

*(A great bell tolls the hour of one.)*

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

ZORAYA

That was the voice of the new day. Farewell.

*(Exit ZORAYA)*

BRASIDAS

Farewell. The new day. It was time the old  
Went to its rest. The new day — the new day!

## SCENE VIII

*A Court of Justice. PETRUS in the judgment seat. ABBO of the Woods arraigned before him. The QUEEN, VENORA, and others sitting as spectators. Guards, scribes, officials. At the back of the Court the populace.*

### PETRUS

The crime, which with deliberate fell intent,  
Before a multitude of witnesses,  
You did notoriously commit, and here  
Acknowledge by your own mouth without shame,  
Is one, the like whereof hath not been seen  
On this our soil, within men's memory.  
You took your victim, the most noble Volmar,  
All unawares, in the great hour that crowned  
His glorious life, and slew him on the steps  
Of the King's palace, with the same stroke  
wounding  
The heart of a whole people.

*(Enter HESPERUS)*

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

From that hour  
Till now, all justice and all fairness have  
Been shown to you. Nothing which might avail  
you,  
In this your trial, hath been to you denied.  
You have been proffered, and you did refuse,  
The services of one who, by vocation  
A pleader at the Bar, would have set forth  
Whatever might be urged in your behoof,  
With suasive art and skill. Nought now remains  
But to pass judgment on you, and apportion  
Your penalty to the greatness of that guilt,  
Which in its full height stands before the world,  
Manifest to all men's eyes.

### HESPERUS

Most learned Judge,  
I crave indulgence for what well might seem  
A lawless trespass upon this tribunal.  
No least infringement of its sanctity  
Do I intend. Indeed, though I have ne'er  
Sat amid those who practise in our courts,  
Yet have I, without favour, or the relaxing  
Of due and rigorous tests, attained to hold  
A mastership and doctorate in our laws,  
Such as do fully entitle me, if so

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

I list, to take my stand with professed pleaders,  
The brotherhood of the forensic robe.  
Nay, in the quality of an advocate,  
Not else, do I claim audience in this court;  
And though it be at the eleventh hour,  
And almost one can see the headsman's finger  
Trying the axe, I call for stay of sentence,  
Till I can bring before you certain matter  
Unbroached yet in this trial, but none the less  
Most pertinent to the issue.

P E T R U S

At your desire  
Judgment shall stand deferred, and aught you  
say  
Shall here be gravely pondered.

H E S P E R U S

Prisoner,  
What King is he whom thou dost serve?

A B B O

King Othgar,  
Thine enemy.

H E S P E R U S

In whose land wert thou born?

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

A B B O

King Othgar's land, which ye made war upon.

H E S P E R U S

Where was thy dwelling?

A B B O

In the forest, near  
The boundaries where King Othgar's land meets  
thine.

H E S P E R U S

(*to the JUDGE*)

Now, as it chanches, tidings which to-day  
Have reached us, from those confines make it plain  
That, notwithstanding Volmar's victories,  
A state of war hath never truly ceased.  
Still on the frontier do its smouldering embers  
Flash daily into angry life, and though  
The enemy's hosts in battle on battle were quelled,  
Their Kingdom, as a Kingdom, ne'er did make  
Formal submission, nor hath any pact  
Or treaty of peace been signed, and, in a word,  
A state of war still to this hour obtains;  
Whence I contend that this man's act, the slaying  
Of his own countrymen's arch-enemy,

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

Was in its essence a pure act of war,  
Entitling him to no more grievous usage  
Than all those captives of our arms receive,  
Whom we condemn to labour in the mines  
Or at the galleys.

P E T R U S

I must count your plea  
As but a specious one. Nought hath been here  
Adduced in proof that this man's action flowed  
From any founts akin to public virtue  
Or patriot zeal. You give to his deed a colour  
Which its own doer perchance would disavow.

H E S P E R U S

(to ABBO)

What moved thee to the deed? Tell unto us  
Its story.

A B B O

On that border, where till now  
My dwelling was, there grew I up from birth,  
And lived by hunting of great forest beasts,  
And selling of their furs, and tusks, and hides.  
Alone I dwelt, save that my child, my daughter,  
A damsel ripening unto womanhood,

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

Dwelt with me. And it came to pass, when first  
Ye marched against my country, that your armies  
Were thereabouts encamped a little while;  
And one day, toward eventide, the maiden,  
My daughter, by rude hands laid hold upon,  
Was taken and carried unto Volmar's tent,  
That he might have his will with her, and there,  
Upon that night, he forced her to abide.  
And in the morn she was cast out among  
The soldiers, to be slave to any man's  
Desire. This was I told by one that knew.  
But ere another sun went down upon them  
They found her body, slain by her own hand,  
For she and Shame could not live on together.  
And in the woods I abode, and when your hosts  
Marched back that way, with the camp-followers  
I mixed unknown, and with them hitherward  
I came. And God was good to me. He gave  
Into these hands the man they hungered for;  
And I did take and slay him in his pride.  
And could I slay him a thousand times again,  
That would I do.

### P E T R U S

Thus is the prisoner's act,  
Save in the greatness of the victim, seen

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

To stand with common crimes of private vengeance.  
As for his private wrongs, and whether these  
Do in some measure palliate his offence,  
With all such questions I am unconcerned.  
I sit not here to deal in casuistry,  
But to administer the law. His crime  
Was open and flagrant, and if I myself  
Did inwardly incline to pardon him,  
I could not. The prerogative of pardon  
Dwells with the King alone.

H E S P E R U S

Then to the King  
I make appeal.

K I N G

Thou might'st, with as good fortune,  
Appeal to the dead hero, that lies stark  
In his yet unclosed coffin, as to me.

V E N O R A

O King, remember this man's mighty woe.

Q U E E N

If thou had'st but a daughter of thine own —

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

V E N O R A

*(throwing herself at his feet)*

Thou hast! for this thy son and I are wedded,  
Though never until now told we the world.

K I N G

What, secret spousals? When a King's son mates,  
His bride should be the daughter of a King.  
Yet never saw I in thee aught unlovely,  
Or aught unwomanlike — or any fault  
Save what is common to all thy sex, for being  
Women, ye think a Kingdom can be swayed  
By women's tears — ye set a peasant's wrongs,  
And the light handling of a country wench,  
Above a mourning realm.

Q U E E N

Girl, with this kiss  
A queen makes thee her daughter. King, thy wife,  
Thy son, thy daughter, sue for this man's pardon.  
Have pity, have pity upon him.

K I N G

Let pity know  
Its place and season. Pity gone astray  
Hath led men blindfold to the wilderness,  
Whither I'll follow it not. This miscreant's hand

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

Hath robbed me of a man whose worth to me  
Was that of armies. If I pardon him,  
May Heaven in anger —

H E S P E R U S

Oh, speak not some wild word  
Thou 'lt wish to unsay.

K I N G

You Powers, whate'er ye are,  
That weigh us in your balance — if I show  
Mercy unto this murderer, straightway then  
Visit me with your signal malediction,  
And let some visible stroke of instant fate  
Wither me into ashes, even here  
Where now I stand.

H E S P E R U S

My task was hard before,  
And in a moment it is made thrice harder;  
But come what may I will not flinch from it.  
Prisoner, I now must lead thy memory back  
Unto a certain morn, seven years ago,  
When all that border-forest round thy dwelling  
'Rang with the hunters' bugles. On that day,  
There, in a thicket, and by chance divided  
From his companions, lay a stripling, gored

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

Deep by some savage tusk, and bleeding nigh  
To death. And thou did'st find and bear him  
thence

Unto thy dwelling, and did'st dress his wound,  
And with a rough but heartening wine thou did'st  
Bring back the life that else had ebbed too far.  
Hast thou a recollection of his face?

•

A B B O

'T was strangely like thine own.

K I N G

(to HESPERUS)

The man dissembles.  
Thou art mistaken in him — he does but catch  
At the offered cue, and play up to thy thought.

H E S P E R U S

(to ABBO)

Then with returning breath I bade thee ask  
Whate'er thou would'st in recompense, but thou,  
Who knewest not who I was, would'st only take  
A trivial gift, a thing of little price.

A B B O

Not so — it was thy jewelled hunting horn.

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

H E S P E R U S

Whereon I bade thee blow a blast to call  
My comrades, which thou did'st; but when they  
came

Thou wert not to be found, and they declared  
That something either less or more than human  
Had tended me and vanished.

P E T R U S

(to ABBO)

Hast thou still  
That hunting horn?

A B B O

In my wood hut it lies,  
But long ago I plucked from it the gems,  
And sold them, being in need — two greenish  
stones,  
With figures cut upon them. One did seem  
A huntress, and the other was a stag  
Torn down by hounds.

H E S P E R U S

Diana one — the other  
Actaeon, fabled to have been transformed  
Into that antlered shape. Here are some gems

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

Whereon those very figures that you speak of  
Are, with a varying fancy, deftly carven.  
Canst thou point out the two, if here they be,  
Which from that horn thou sever'dst? This is  
one —

A B B O

*(examining the gems)*

That is the other.

H E S P E R U S

True. These two alone  
Are portion of that gift which Volmar gave  
Unto the Queen — those jewels brought by him  
From this man's country; and these two I well  
Remember, as having once been set in gold  
On that same Bugle of mine.

K I N G

Woe, woe is me!

V O I C E S O F T H E P O P U L A C E

Pardon the man. Release him. Let him go.

K I N G

Have I not called on Heaven to smite me down  
If I should show him mercy?

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

VOICES

\*Set him free.\*

He saved thy son.

KING

The dread Power I invoked  
Is swift to take us at our word, and bind us  
To the letter of our contracts.

HESPERUS

King, my father, —  
God is more just than thou dost picture Him.  
Dost thou suppose He is a bartering God,  
That makes a profit out of our poor folly,  
Alert to seize on our unwariness,\*  
To catch us tripping and stickle for a price?  
And should'st thou dare to do a worthy thing,  
Dost thou imagine that the august Begetter  
Of all this world shall then fall short of thee  
In righteous dealing?

KING

He hath me in His hold,  
And thou, who art young, know'st not how hard  
it is  
To slip out of a bargain made with Heaven.

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

### VOICES

Pardon the man. Free him. He saved thy son.

*(Enter among the populace ZORAYA)*

### ZORAYA

Hear me, O King! There is one only way  
' For thee to cut this knot. Lay down thy King-  
ship;  
Then shall a King succeed, who hath not yet  
Pledged him to cast out Mercy, but will rather  
Beckon her to an almost equal seat  
Beside great Justice.

### VOICES

A word in season. Ay,  
A wise word. Abdicate. Uncrown thyself.

### KING

Ye cannot be as weary of your King  
As he is weary of Kingdom. I will do  
Your bidding. I am very humble now.  
See, I make way for another — for a King  
Not bound, like me, by a rash covenant  
With the exacting skies.

*(He breaks the seal of his ring, which he places to  
his lips. He staggers and sinks back.)*

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

QUEEN

O help, ere he

Be gone! Help!

VENORA

Then the ring had poison in it!

KING

He whom I sent for loiters not, but hither  
Rides at full speed. Wife, thou didst ever have  
Great patience with me.

HESPERUS

Can we do nought at all  
To ease thy going hence?

KING

There's nothing needed.  
After this tangled life, death seems a thing  
Most excellently simple.

*(Dies)*

HESPERUS

He is dead.  
He who alive had much infirmity  
Hath strongly laid life down. Whate'er his faults,

## THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN

We'll think them not himself, but outermost  
Apparel only, and fold them all away  
In silence. As for thee, who standest there  
And seest thy vengeance full and perfected,  
The King alone could pardon thee, and I  
Am henceforth King. Take then from me for-  
giveness,  
And go thou back to thine own land in peace.

THE END



**A CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF  
MR. WILLIAM WATSON'S WORKS  
WITH CONTENTS OF EACH VOLUME**



# THE PRINCE'S QUEST.

1880. KEGAN PAUL & CO.

NOW PUBLISHED BY JOHN LANE. *Price 4s. 6d. net.*

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THE RIVER.

CHANGED VOICES.

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A SONG OF THREE SINGERS.

LOVE'S ASTROLOGY.

THREE FLOWERS.

THREE ETERNITIES.

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BEETHOVEN.

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SKYFARING.

# EPIGRAMS OF ART, LIFE, AND NATURE.

[*Out of print.*]

1884. LIVERPOOL: GILBERT & G. WALMSLEY.

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1890. LONDON: T. FISHER UNWIN.

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[*Out of Print.*

1892. LONDON AND NEW YORK: MACMILLAN AND CO.

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